



Health Department
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To: Residents of Clark and Skamania Counties

From: Willa A. Fisher, MD, MPH
Acting Health Officer

Re: Viral gastroenteritis

The Clark County Health Department was notified today of an apparent outbreak of viral gastroenteritis (commonly known as stomach flu) in Vancouver. Health Department staff are investigating this outbreak and working to implement preventive measures to stop the spread of illness.

Over the past few months we have had several outbreaks of norovirus, a virus causing gastroenteritis, in assisted living facilities as well as an increase of viral gastroenteritis symptoms in the general population in Clark County.

Since gastroenteritis may affect your family we want you to know about the disease and how you can prevent its spread in your family and workplace.

What is Viral Gastroenteritis?

Many different viruses can cause gastroenteritis.

Symptoms: Nausea, vomiting and watery diarrhea

Onset: 15-48 hours after infected

Duration of Illness: 12-60 hours (usually self limiting, mild)

Treatment: Rest, drink plenty of fluids. There is no specific treatment. Contact your physician if dehydration occurs.

Return to work or school: 48 hours after last episode of vomiting or diarrhea

How do people become infected?

Viruses are found in the stool or vomit of infected people. People can become infected with the virus in several ways, including:

- eating food or drinking liquids that are contaminated with virus;

- touching surfaces or objects contaminated with virus, and then placing their hand in their mouth;
- having direct contact with another person who is infected and showing symptoms (for example, when caring for someone with illness, or sharing foods or eating utensils with someone who is ill).

Can infections be prevented?

Yes. You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with viruses causing gastroenteritis by:

- Frequently wash your hands, especially after toilet visits and changing diapers and before eating or preparing food.
- Carefully wash fruits and vegetables.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner.
- Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated with virus after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap).
- Flush or discard any vomitus and/or stool in the toilet and make sure that the surrounding area is kept clean.
- Clean surfaces such as counter tops, doorknobs, and telephones, with a bleach-based household cleaner.

Persons who are sick should not prepare food while they have symptoms and for at least 48 hours after they recover from their illness. Food that may have been contaminated by an ill person should be disposed of properly.

Persons working in daycare centers or nursing homes should pay special attention to the above preventive measures if children or residents have gastroenteritis, as it can spread rapidly throughout such environments.

If you have questions or concerns about viral gastroenteritis call Clark County Health Department communicable disease staff at 397-8182.